20 September 1994

Memo to: the Board of Directors of POINT FOUNDATION
From: Jivan Tabibian
Re: thoughts on POINT after 9.11.94 gathering

Thanks again for inviting me to participate in your "family" get together last Sunday at Muir Beach. Before my thoughts and impressions get too stale, I'd like to share with you some observations. I hope I am not being presumptuous.

First, let me tell you that for an outsider like me, it is impressive to witness the very large convergence of opinion that was apparent concerning the basic values of Point and the Whole Earth Review. One could even see through all these generic values some broad consensus about a "mission." However, while there seemed to be a basic commitment to the core of the faith, I also heard some anxiety about the need to revitalize the expression of that faith. After 25 years, it is of course natural to see the effects of inertia. The staff seems to be much more comfortable with the way things have always been done, just like clergy. But the parishioners are eager for some reinvigoration in the style and content of the sermon. An updating, so to speak. Perhaps new blood to deliver a more "market sensitive" or "constituency sensitive" product, to a world that has changed since the birth of Whole Earth. Women, multiculturalism, globalization, a less innocent (naive perhaps) approach to politics are all in need of greater articulation, inclusion, recognition. An optimistic, hopeful, can-do attitude must not exclude the consciousness of issues—transnational, global, systemic, profoundly political—that cannot lend themselves to one-dimensional analyses, quick fixes and individualistic initiatives.

Perhaps the present crisis—on the surface merely a financial crunch—is an opportune moment. While there seems to be no doubt that Point must continue to insure the publication of Whole Earth Review, its success

cannot be taken for granted. In this regard, here are some recommendations:

a. From #85 on, the publication of WER must conform to tight budgetary constraints. This can be achieved by zero-based budgeting and not by trying to just scale down the existing operation's costs. It will not be a disaster if both the volume (# of pages) and the size (format) of WER were to be changed, if they were to yield substantial savings in production costs. The direct payroll and benefits must be kept under a fixed maximum. It is my impression (based on rough figures) that that maximum cannot exceed $60k per issue.

b. The editor, managing editor, and guest editor relationships must be clarified, be flexible, inventive, both to save money, and to find ways to make things more exciting. It is important to have an active, lively, heterogeneous, inspiring board of editorial advisors, whose ranks can be raided as possible guest editors (and contributing writers).

c. As often as possible have issues devoted mostly to a single theme (except for service, catalog, news, gossip, reference functions). The theme approach would fit well with the guest editor strategy, and more importantly allow sponsorship by interested third parties (foundations, corporations, advertisers, angels, other publications, etc.).

d. Advertising: this is a delicate subject. At no time must the readers feel that there is the remotest connection between advertising and endorsement (except for Point's own products like MWEC). The best advertisers are those that provide "neutral" support or infrastructure services, especially if they do not contradict the WER ethos.

e. Finally there is the question of profit versus not-for-profit. The inducements and seduction of for profit are numerous, and it seems the advocates are many. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, some of our reflexive distaste for the idea of profit also collapsed. For a board strapped for cash, there is something very tempting to a solution that will get it out of a difficult situation. I personally believe that it is a temptation that <u>must</u> be resisted for two reasons: one, because the scenarios are a little too optimistic in the absence of concrete plans for

capitalization; and two, because it will change WER in ways which in the long run will gradually erode the message, the mission, the meaning. If you don't believe this, read (or re-read) Goethe's *Dr. Faustus*!

Let me conclude with a few ideas about organizational and structural issues. In the first 25 years of its existence, perhaps Point's board was best being invisible. Perhaps at the very beginning Stewart was sufficient: leader, supporter, inspiration, fundraiser, colleague. As the staff took care of business, obviously the board became a decoration with very little real work, responsibility, accountability.

Things are different now, and I think that the long term survival and flourishing of Point can only happen with and through a recast board: expanded, active, hands on, accountable, and mindful of all the tedious formalities and procedural requirements that normally go with live and successful non-profits. The staff will have to learn to live with a real board. In fact, without an activist board, the staff will not have much of a chance beyond the grind of a survival tactic focused on the publication of a diminished WER.

It is up to the board to reinvent both the foundation and its activities: restate the mission, identify new opportunities, reorder priorities, return to the cutting edge. Without such leadership, there is the risk of WER limping along, useful but modest, righteous but timid, more nostalgic than trailblazing. It may be worth persuing a brief but concentrated effort to demythologizie Point (and WER) itself and truly prepare it for the millennium. Let me know if I can be of any further assistance.